

The Caesar Photo Fraud that Undermined Syrian Negotiations

12 Problems with the Story of Mass Torture and Execution in Syria



by Rick Sterling
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Syria Solidarity Movement

Syria Solidarity Movement is an international network of people who oppose the war of aggression against Syria. We have members and supporters around the globe including in Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, USA, Canada, UK, France, Australia and beyond. For more information, please visit our website at www.syriasolidaritymovement.org If you share our concerns and beliefs, we invite you to donate and/or work with us. We receive no funds or support from any government, government agency or large foundation. We operate on volunteer efforts and commitment.



Mission Statement

We call for the recognition and enforcement of international law and the UN Charter which prohibit aggression by one sovereign state against another.

We advocate universal respect for and protection of Syrian sovereignty and territory in accordance with international law, and we oppose all military intervention, whether by means of arms, military training, intelligence, personnel or equipment.

We advocate massive provision of humanitarian aid for all displaced Syrians, wherever they may be, including Syrian territory.

We advocate a Syrian national dialogue, in a location and with protections and guarantees that permit all parties to feel safe, and without the exclusion of any parties.

Out of respect for human life and dignity, we advocate the use of exclusively nonviolent means of national resolution and reconciliation in Syria and between Syria and other nations.

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Note regarding the images of dead bodies in this report:

The images in this report come from publicly available websites www.safmcd.org and <https://en.zamanalwsl.net/galleries.php>

Considering that these images were taken without authorization from Syria and have been used in a partisan manner, we do not accept the claim to ownership by the “Syrian Association of Missing and Conscience Detainees” (SAFMCD).

We regret the loss of life by all people. Without the interference of foreign powers, in clear violation of international law and the UN Charter, most of these people would be alive today.

We respect the deceased and sympathize with their families. At the same time, we believe it is essential for the public to be aware of the realities of this conflict.

WARNING

**This report contains graphic images
showing violence and death.
Use discretion.**

INTRODUCTION

There is a pattern of sensational but untrue reports that lead to public acceptance of US and Western military intervention in countries around the world:

* In Gulf War 1, there were reports of Iraqi troops stealing incubators from Kuwait, leaving babies to die on the cold floor. Amnesty International incorrectly “verified” the false accusations.

* Ten years later, there were reports of yellow cake uranium going to Iraq for development of weapons of mass destruction.

* One decade later, there were reports of Libyan soldiers drugged on viagra and raping women as they advanced.

* In 2012, NBC broadcaster Richard Engel was supposedly kidnapped by pro-Assad Syrian militia but luckily freed by Syrian opposition fighters, the “Free Syrian Army”.

All these reports were later confirmed to be fabrications and lies. They all had the goal of manipulating public opinion and they all succeeded in one way or another. Despite the consequences, which were often disastrous, none of the perpetrators were punished or paid any price. The Washington DC politicians and consulting firm who created the incubator hoax, were never even reprimanded let alone punished. Libya is in chaos today yet who has been held to account? Richard Engel understood the kidnapping was a hoax but stayed quiet until the true story was about to be publicly revealed.

It has been famously said “Those who do not learn from the past are doomed to repeat it.”

This report is a critical review of the “Caesar Torture Photos” story. As will be shown, there is strong evidence the accusations are entirely or substantially false.

OVERVIEW AND TIMELINE OF THE ‘CAESAR TORTURE PHOTOS’

On 20 January 2014, two days before negotiations about the Syrian conflict were scheduled to begin in Switzerland, a sensational report burst onto television and front pages around the world. The story was that a former Syrian army photographer had 55,000 photographs documenting the torture and killing of 11,000 detainees by the Syrian security establishment.

The Syrian photographer was given the code-name ‘Caesar’. . The story became known as the “Caesar Torture Photos”. A team of lawyers plus digital and forensic experts were hired by the Carter-Ruck law firm, on contract to Qatar, to go to the Middle East and check the veracity of “Caesar” and his story. They concluded that “Caesar” was truthful and the photographs indicated “industrial scale killing”. CNN, London’s Guardian and LeMonde broke the story which was subsequently broadcast in news reports around the world. Comparisons were made to the Nazis and Khmer Rouge as the Assad government in Syria was demonized and demands that “Assad must go” were strengthened.

The Syrian government [denied](#) the accusations, saying the photos show “*foreign terrorists from several nationalities who had been killed when attacking the military checkpoints and civil institutions*” and “*part of them are civilians and military personnel who were tortured and killed by the armed terrorist groups because of their support to the state.*”

For the past two years the story has been preserved with occasional bursts of publicity, attention and supposedly corroborating reports. Significant milestones include:

- * Jan 20, 2014 - The sensational story was first broadcast.
- * Jan 22, 2014 - The ‘Caesar torture photos’ story was announced at the UN sponsored negotiations. The Syrian government was vilified and negotiations soon broke down.
- * April 2014 - The “Caesar” [photographs were exhibited](#) to informal United Nations Security Council meeting.
- * July 2014 - Wearing a hood and covering his face, ‘Caesar’ testified at the Congressional Foreign Relations Committee.
- * October 2014 - The Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington hosted an exhibit of “Caesar” photographs.
- * March 2015 - The Syrian Association for Missing and Conscience Detainees (SAFMCD) posted about 7,000 ‘Caesar’ photographs at their newly launched [website](#).
- * October 2015 - The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) issued a report titled “The Photographed Holocaust: Analytical Study of the Leaked Pictures of Torture Victims in Syrian Military Hospitals”.
- * December 2015 - Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a report “If the Dead Could Speak: Mass Deaths and Torture in Syria’s Detention Facilities”.
- * February 2016 - As another effort at negotiations to stop the conflict in Syria was launched in Geneva, ‘Caesar torture photos’ were brought for display.

Problems with the Story of Mass Torture and Execution in Syria

1. Almost half the photos show the opposite of the allegations.

The Carter Ruck Inquiry Team claimed there were about 55,000 photos total with about half of them taken by 'Caesar' and the other half by other photographers. The Carter Ruck team claimed the photos were all 'similar'. Together they are all known as 'Caesar's Torture Photos'.

The photographs are in the custody of an opposition organization called the Syrian Association for Missing and Conscience Detainees (SAFMCD). In 2015, they allowed Human Rights Watch (HRW) to study all the photographs which have otherwise been secret. In December 2015, HRW released their report titled "If the Dead Could Speak". The biggest revelation is that over 46% of the photographs (24,568) do not show people 'tortured to death' by the Syrian government. On the contrary, they show dead Syrian soldiers and victims of car bombs and other violence (HRW pp2-3). Thus, nearly half the photos show the opposite of what was alleged. These photos, never revealed to the public, confirm that the opposition is violent and has killed large numbers of Syrian security forces and civilians.

The Sensational Initial Story

"In all, approximately fifty-five thousand (55,000) images have, to date, been made available.....this approximates to there being images of of about eleven thousand (11,000) dead detainees."
(Carter Ruck Executive Summary)

But 46% of photos show the opposite:

Human Rights Watch was given access to 53,275 unique files and revealed that 24,568 images show "dead army soldiers or members of the security forces" and "crime scene photographs.... Including the aftermath of explosions, assassinations of security officers, fires, and car bombs."



Legal and forensic experts for hire.

2. The claim that other photos only show ‘tortured detainees’ is exaggerated or false.

The Carter Ruck report says that ‘Caesar’ only photographed bodies brought from Syrian government detention centers and showing signs of “starvation, brutal beatings, strangulation, and other forms of torture and killing”.

In their December 2015 report, HRW said, “ The largest category of photographs, 28,707 images, are photographs Human Rights Watch understands to have died in government custody, either in one of several detention facilities or after being transferred to a military hospital.” They estimate 6,786 dead individuals in the set.

The key question is how and where did these people die? Were they all detainees tortured and killed by the ‘regime’ as claimed by the Carter Ruck team? Did they all die in “government custody” as claimed by HRW?

These assertions are very dubious. Although we have only been allowed to see a small percentage of the photographs, these suggest victims who died in wide variety of circumstances. Over 80% of the photographs are from branches 227 (Damascus) and 215 (Secret Raids and Intrusions). In their work at the borders and within conflict zones, they would encounter all the following: dead and injured opposition fighters, dead and injured civilians, dead and injured Syrian soldiers and allies. Some of the victims may have been prisoners executed by one of the armed opposition groups. When encountering victims of the conflict, the Syrian military would transfer the bodies to the military hospitals where the injured could be treated and the deceased processed and buried.

Following are a few photographs suggesting different victim types:

Victims of shrapnel and bullet wounds:



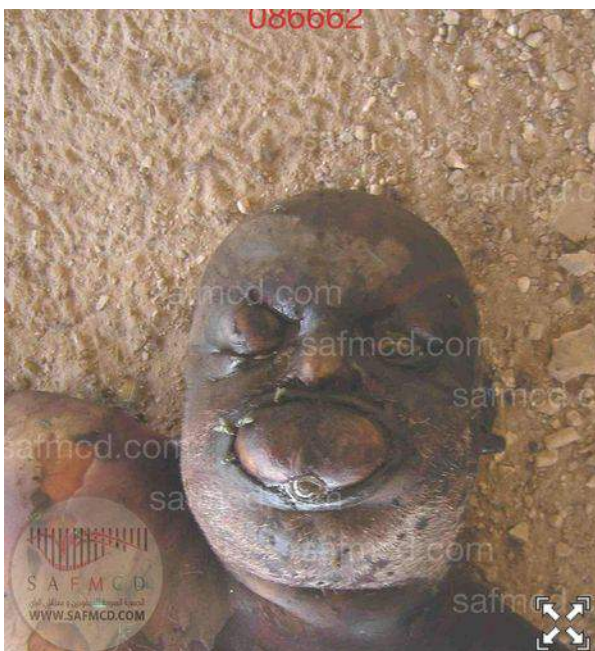
Victims who died from from wounds.



Victims who died after receiving medical attention



Victims who died and started to decompose and bloat



Possible foreign fighters who died in the conflict



Victims of Execution by Armed Opposition



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wy_XmN1NoY0

In summary, the photos and the deceased are real. But how they died and the circumstances are unclear. There is strong evidence some died in conflict. Others died in the hospital. Others died and their bodies were decomposing before they were picked up. These photographs seem to document a war time situation where many combatants and civilians are killed. It seems the military hospital was doing what it had always done: maintaining a photographic and documentary record of the deceased. Bodies were picked up by different military or intelligence branches. While some may have died in detention; the big majority probably died in the conflict zones. The accusations by 'Caesar', the Carter Ruck report and HRW that these are all victims of "death in detention" or "death by torture" or death in 'government custody" are almost certainly false.

3. The true identity of “Caesar” is probably not as claimed.

Carter Ruck Report says “This witness who defected from Syria and who had been working for the Syrian government was given the code-name ‘Caesar’ by the inquiry team to protect the witness and members of his family.” (CRR p12) However if his story is true, it would be easy for the Syrian government to determine who he really is. After all, how many military photographers took photos at Tishreen and Military 601 Hospitals during those years and then disappeared? According to the Carter Ruck report, Caesar’s family left Syria around the same time. Considering this, why is “Caesar” keeping his identity secret from the western audience? Why does “Caesar” refuse to meet even with highly sympathetic journalists or researchers?

Caesar’s story changes in significant ways over time. Based on December 2013 interviews, the Carter Ruck report says, “The inquiry team was informed by ‘Caesar’ that for the last three years his only job together with others in his section, was to photograph and document bodies of detainees who had been killed.” (CRR p12) But in interviews with SNHR in summer 2015, ‘Caesar’ changes the account to include victims of “massacres” plus “some of the victims’ bodies belonged to armed opposition groups who were killed or injured during clashes with government forces”. (SNHR introduction).

The fact that 46% of the total photographic set is substantially the opposite of what was claimed indicates two possibilities:

- * Caesar and his promoters knew the contents but lied about them expecting nobody to look.
- * Caesar and his promoters did not know the contents and falsely assumed they were like the others.

The latter seems more likely which supports the theory that Caesar is not who he claims to be.



**“Caesar” with hood and face concealed at House Foreign Affairs Committee.
What does he have to hide?**

4. The Carter Ruck Inquiry was faulty, rushed and politically biased.

The credibility of the “Caesar” story has been substantially based on the Carter-Ruck Inquiry Team which was supposed to check the authenticity of the defecting photographer and his photographs. The following facts suggest the team was biased with a political motive:

- * the investigation was financed by the government of Qatar which is a major supporter of the armed opposition.
- * the contracted law firm, Carter Ruck and Co, has previously represented Turkey’s President Erdogan, also known for his avid support of the armed opposition.
- * the American on the legal inquiry team, Prof David M. Crane, has a long history working for U.S. Dept of Defense and Defense Intelligence Agency. The U.S. Government has been deeply involved in the attempt at ‘regime change’ with demands that ‘Assad must go’ beginning in summer 2011 and continuing until recently.
- * Prof Crane is personally partisan in the conflict. He has campaigned for a Syrian War Crimes Tribunal and testified before Congress in October 2013, three months before the Caesar revelations.
- * by their own admission, the inquiry team was under “time constraints” (CRR, p11).
- * by their own admission, the inquiry team did not even survey most of the photographs.
- * the inquiry team was either ignorant of the content or intentionally lied about the 46% showing dead Syrian soldiers and attack victims.
- * the inquiry team did their last interview with “Caesar” on January 18, quickly finalized a report and rushed it into the media on January 20, two days prior to the start of UN sponsored negotiations.

The self-proclaimed “rigor” of the Carter Ruck investigation is without foundation. The claims to a ‘scientific’ investigation are verging on the ludicrous.

One might question why Qatar would want to subvert the negotiations. In her book “Hard Choices”, former Secretary of State Clinton described the situation in 2012: Qatar and Saudi Arabia “backed the rebels and wanted Assad gone.” (p450). As shown in the BBC report from Jan 22, 2014 “The leading Syrian rebel groups say they reject the peace conference”. The “Caesar” story contributed to poisoning the atmosphere and undermining negotiations.





Jan 2014 ““The leading Syrian rebel groups have said they reject the peace conference.”

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THE INTERVIEW

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David M. Crane, Co-author of a report on Syrian prisoners

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David M. Crane, Co-author of a report on Syrian prisoners

David Michael Crane, a former chief prosecutor at the Special Court for Sierra Leone and a law professor at Syracuse University, is one of the co-authors of a report on the treatment of Syrian prisoners. Along with two other prominent lawyers, he alleges that at least 11,000 detainees have been tortured and killed while in the custody of the Assad regime's security forces.

By Douglas HERBERT

“he alleges that at least 11,000 detainees have been tortured and killed”

5. The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is involved.

In an [interview](#) on France24, Prof. David Crane of the inquiry team describes how ‘Caesar’ was brought to meet them by “his handler, his case officer”. The expression ‘case officer’ usually refers to the CIA. This would be a common expression for Prof. Crane who previously worked in the Defense Intelligence Agency. The involvement of the CIA additionally makes sense since there was a [CIA budget](#) of \$1Billion for Syria operations in 2013.

Prof. Crane’s “Syria Accountability Project” is based at Syracuse University where the CIA [actively recruits](#) new officers despite student resistance.

Why does it matter if the CIA is connected to the ‘Caesar’ story? Because the CIA has a long history of disinformation campaigns. In 2011, false reports of viagra fueled rape by Libyan soldiers were widely broadcast in western media as the U.S. pushed for a military mandate. Decades earlier, the world was shocked to hear about Cuban troops fighting in Angola raping Angolan women. The CIA chief of station for Angola, John Stockwell, later described how they invented the false report and spread it round the world. The CIA was very proud of that disinformation achievement. Stockwell’s book, **“In Search of Enemies”** is still relevant.

The Carter Ruck report does not mention how the interviews with ‘Caesar’ were conducted. Was the interview conducted in English? Does ‘Caesar’ speak English? When ‘Caesar’ testified at a Congressional committee, there was a translator. When ‘Caesar’ was interviewed on three separate days by the Carter Ruck inquiry team, was the CIA ‘case officer’ his translator? If so, there would obviously be a question about the authenticity of the interview.



The screenshot shows the top of a web browser displaying the Daily Beast website. The navigation bar includes links for POLITICS, ENTERTAINMENT, WORLD, U.S. NEWS, TECH + HEALTH, BEASTSTYLE, and VIDEO. Below the navigation bar is a large red banner image. The article title is "The CIA's Syria Program and the Perils of Proxies" by Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Nathaniel Barr. The sub-headline reads: "After fighting al Qaeda and its affiliates for a decade and a half, the CIA is now helping them gain ground in Syria." The main text begins with: "Almost every aspect of the Obama administration's policy toward Syria has been scrutinized, lambasted or praised in recent months, but one of the most significant facets, the CIA's covert aid program to Syrian rebels, has largely slipped below the radar." A Facebook share button is visible on the left. At the bottom of the visible text, it says: "It is time that we start paying attention, since this initiative is benefiting the very jihadist".

“After fighting Al Qaeda and its affiliates for a decade and a half, the CIA is now helping them in Syria”

6. The prosecutors portray simple administrative procedures as mysterious and sinister.

The Carter Ruck inquiry team falsely claimed there were about 11,000 tortured and killed detainees. They then posed the question: Why would the Syrian government photograph and document the people they just killed? The Carter Ruck Report speculates that the military hospital photographed the dead to prove that the “orders to kill” had been followed. The “orders to kill” are assumed.

A more logical explanation is that dead bodies were photographed as part of normal hospital / morgue procedure to maintain a file of the deceased who were received or treated at the hospital.

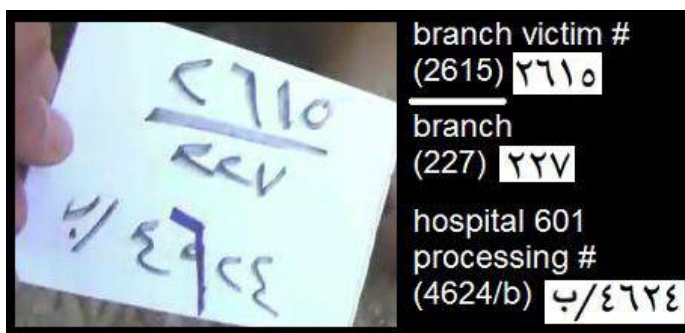
The same applies to the body labeling / numbering system. The Carter Ruck report suggest there is something mysterious and possibly sinister in the coded tagging system. But all morgues need to have a tagging and identification system.

When bodies were received from one of the military branches, after conflict or after detention, the system was simple and logical:

- The first number identifies the military branch which had custody or picked up the body
- The second number is the individual number assigned by the branch
- The third number is the case number assigned by the military hospital.



Western Morgue Toe Tag



Syrian Tagging Code System

Another example of hyperbole and distortion is the comparison of the military overflow morgue to a “slaughterhouse”. In a war situation there are obviously high number of deaths and the normal morgue facilities can become inadequate. What to do? The Syrians used an outside covered garage area for wrapping the bodies in plastic in preparation for transport and burial. See the photo below. Sinister? Not really.

The bodies on the ground may be shocking for an audience unused to seeing dead bodies. But in reality things can be vastly more grim and one needs to consider context. It appears that the Syrian military hospital continued to follow long standing procedures to document the deceased and keep a simple documentation system in trying times. The photo from the temporary morgue shows Syrian soldiers bagging corpses. For contrast, the other photo below shows what a real ‘slaughter’ looks like: the execution of Syrian soldiers on their knees by western and gulf supported opposition.



Corpses being bagged by two soldiers in morgue overflow area.



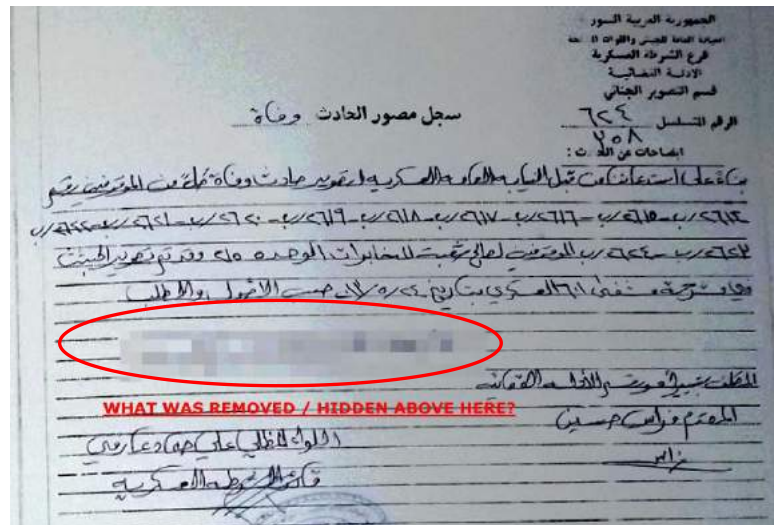
This is what slaughter looks like: Nusra opposition killing Syrian soldiers.

7. The photos have been tampered with.

Many of the photos at the SAFMCD website have been manipulated. The information card and tape identity are covered over and sections of documents are obscured. It must have been very time consuming to do this for thousands of photos. The explanation that they are doing this to 'protect identity' is not credible since the faces of victims are visible. What are they hiding?



Why are card and tape obscured?



Why is information blocked on the document?



Forehead and card obscured.



Forehead tag and card obscured.

8. The Photo Catalog has duplicates and other errors

There are numerous errors and anomalies in the photo catalog as presented at the SAFMCD website.

For example, some deceased persons are shown twice with different case numbers and dates.

For example, Abdullah Arlsan al Hariri (HRW p39) is shown one time as Case 948944 dated June 2012; another time he is shown as Case 765908 dated July 2013.



Another victim is identified as Case 480324 detained by branch 227 with date July 3, 2012; another time the same victim is identified as Case 706348 detained by branch 215 on July 1 2012.



There are other errors where different individuals are given the same identity number.

Is Military Branch 215 - Detainee 569 the victim on the left below or the right?

Note that the case number can be 4 digits so the number is not cycling.



Is Military Branch 215 - Detainee 567 the victim on the left below or the right?



We might be able to determine whether the error was in the original labeling but SAFMCD has obscured the numbers on the foreheads.

Researcher Adam Larson at A Closer Look at Syria website has done [detailed investigation](#) which reveals many more errors and curious error patterns in the SAFMCD photo catalog.

9. With few exceptions, Western media uncritically accepted and promoted the story.

The Carter Ruck report was misleadingly labeled “Confidential” while being distributed to CNN, the Guardian and LeMonde.

CNN’s Christiane Amanpour [gushed the story](#) as she interviewed three of the inquiry team under the headline **“EXCLUSIVE: Gruesome Syria photos may prove torture by Assad regime”**. Critical journalism was replaced by leading questions and affirmation. David Crane said “This is a smoking gun”. Desmond de Silva “likened the images to those of holocaust survivors”.

[The guardian report](#) was titled **“Syrian regime document trove shows evidence of 'industrial scale' killing of detainees”** with subtitle **“Senior war crimes prosecutors say photographs and documents provide 'clear evidence' of systematic killing of 11,000 detainees”**

One of the very few [skeptical reports](#) was by Dan Murphy in the Christian Science Monitor. Murphy echoed standard accusations about Syria but went on to say incisively, *“the report itself is nowhere near as credible as it makes out and should be viewed for what it is: A well-timed propaganda exercise funded by [Qatar](#), a regime opponent who has funded rebels fighting Assad who have committed war crimes of their own.”*

Unfortunately that was one of very few critical reports in the mainstream media.

In 2012, foreign affairs journalist Jonathan Steele wrote an article describing the overall media bias on Syria.. His [article](#) was titled “Most Syrians back Assad but you’d never know from western media”. The media campaign and propaganda has continued without stop. It was in this context that the Carter Ruck Report was delivered and widely accepted without question.



CNN - Sensational, uncritical, inaccurate.



WORLD | SECURITY WATCH | BACKCHANNELS

Syria 'smoking gun' report warrants a careful read

The report by former war crimes prosecutors alleges the Syrian regime has tortured 11,000 prisoners. The claim is credible, but don't forget the agenda.

By Dan Murphy, Staff writer | JANUARY 21, 2014

Save for later

CSM identified contradictions and expressed skepticism.



Al Jazeera is based in Qatar and funded by Qatari government.



Industrial scale killing or industrial scale propaganda?

10. Politicians have used the Caesar story to push for more US/NATO aggression.

Politicians seeking direct US intervention for ‘regime change’ in Syria were also quick to accept and broadcast the ‘Caesar’ story. They used it to demonize the Assad government and argue that the US must act so as to prevent “another holocaust”, ‘another Rwanda’, ‘another Cambodia’.

When Caesar’s photos were displayed at the House Foreign Affairs Committee in Congress, Chairman Ed Royce [said](#) “It is far past time that the world act.... It is far past time for the United States to say there is going to be a safe zone across this area in northern Syria.”

“Safe zone” is the new and friendlier sounding expression for “no fly zone”. In reality there already is a ‘safe zone’ free of combat: the border with Turkey. Moving the “safe zone” 10 or 20 miles south would entail invading a sovereign country and dramatically increase the number of deaths and casualties. But the proponents of this count on public ignorance and misleading terminology to promote their interventionist goals.

The top ranking Democrat in the House Foreign Affairs Committee is Eliot Engel. In November 2015 he [said](#) "We're reminded of the photographer, known as Caesar, who sat in this room a year ago, showing us in searing, graphic detail what Assad has done to his own people." Engel went on to advocate for a new authorization for the use of military force.

Republican Senator John McCain is another politician eager to escalate aggression against Syria. He claims to keep some ‘Caesar’ photos on his desk as a daily reminder.

Rep Adam Kinzinger is another advocate for aggression against Syria. At an [event](#) at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in July 2015 he said, *“If we want to destroy ISIS we have to destroy the incubator of ISIS, Bashar al-Assad.”*

The irony and hypocrisy is doubly profound since Rep Kinzinger has [met and coordinated with opposition leader Okaidi](#) who is a [confirmed ally](#) of ISIS. In contrast with Kinzinger’s false claims, it is widely known that ISIS ideology and initial funding came from Saudi Arabia and much of its recent wealth from oil sales via Turkey. The Syrian Army has fought huge battles against ISIS, winning some but losing others with horrific scenes of mass beheading.



Holocaust Memorial Museum as stage for ‘Caesar’ photos & War Advocates



Kinzinger coordinating with Col. Okaidi



US Ambassador to Syria & Col Okaidi



Col Okaidi congratulating ISIS after they seize Menagh Air Base and kill Syrian soldiers



Sen McCain, Mouaz Moustafa and "moderate armed opposition" in Turkey

11. The Human Rights Watch assessment is biased.

HRW has been very active around Syria. After the chemical attacks in greater Damascus on August 21, 2013, HRW rushed a report which concluded that, based on a vector analysis of incoming projectiles, the source of the sarin carrying rockets must have been Syrian government territory. This analysis was later debunked as a “[junk heap of bad evidence](#)” by highly respected investigative journalist Robert Parry. HRW’s assumption about the chemical weapon rocket flight distance was faulty. Additionally it was unrealistic to think you could determine rocket trajectory with 1% accuracy from a canister on the ground. To think you could determine flight trajectory from a canister on the ground that had deflected off a building wall was preposterous.

In spite of this, HRW stuck by its analysis which blamed the Assad government. HRW Director Ken Roth publicly indicated dissatisfaction when an agreement to remove Syrian chemical weapons was reached. Mr. Roth [wanted more](#) than a ‘symbolic’ attack.

In light of the preceding, we note the December 2015 HRW report addressing the claims of Caesar. HRW seems to be the only non-governmental organization to receive the full set of photo files from the custodian. To its credit, HRW acknowledged that nearly half the photos do not show what has been claimed for two years: they show dead Syrian soldiers and militia along with scenes from crime scenes, car bombings, etc...

But HRW’s bias is clearly shown in how they handle this huge contradiction. Amazingly, they suggest the incorrectly identified photographs support the overall claim. They say, “This report focuses on deaths in detention. However other types of photographs are also important. From an evidentiary perspective, they reinforce the credibility of the claims of Caesar about his role as a forensic photographer of the Syrian security forces or at least with someone who has access to their photographs.” (HRW, p31) This seems like saying if someone lies to you half the time that proves they are truthful.

The files disprove the assertion that the files all show tortured and killed. The photographs show a wide range of deceased persons, from Syrian soldiers to Syrian militia members to opposition fighters to civilians trapped in conflict zones to regular deaths in the military hospital. There may be some photos of detainees who died in custody after being tortured, or who were simply executed. We know that this happened in Iraqi detention centers under U.S. occupation. Ugly and brutal things happen in war times. But the facts strongly suggest that the ‘Caesar’ account is basically untrue or a gross exaggeration.

Despite the obvious contradictions, HRW supports the ‘Caesar’ story just as they have stuck with the faulty theory about the chemical weapons attack in August 2013. The HRW reports says “Using interviews with family members, former detainees, and defectors who identified locations visible in the photographs, Human Rights Watch determines the photographs to be an authentic record of prisoner deaths in Syrian government facilities.” (HRW p20)

The 85 page HRW report spends 20 pages documenting the cases of eight individuals who were identified in the photo gallery and had family members willing to discuss the case openly with HRW. Some of these testimonies and descriptions may accurately document death in detention. However even with this tiny sample there are caveats: in one of the cases, Abdullah Arslan al Hariri, the victim had been shot and may have died from these wounds. In another case, Osama Hussein Salim, the victim had pre-existing liver disease and may have died from that. In the case of the sole female in the entire set, Rehab al Allawi, there is some doubt about her identity.

The fact that many victims appear emaciated is the basis for some of the hyperbole including comparisons to Nazi prison camps. It is likely some or many of these images show victims from conflict areas under siege or

people imprisoned by the rebel/terror groups.

The HRW report includes 14 pages documenting poor living conditions, bad hygiene, hunger and lack of medication in Syrian detention facilities. While these criticisms may be accurate, the same criticisms could be made against many countries.

It is striking that the HRW report has no acknowledgment of the war conditions and circumstances in Syria. There is no acknowledgment that the government and Syrian Arab Army have been under attack by tens of thousands of weaponized fighters in hundreds of armed opposition groups openly funded and supported by many of the wealthiest countries in the world.

There is no hint at the huge loss of life suffered by the Syrian army and supporters defending their country. The current estimates range from eighty to one hundred and twenty thousand Syrian soldiers, militia and allies having died in the conflict. During the three years 2011 - 2013, including the period covered by Caesar photos, it is estimated that over 52,000 Syrian soldiers and civilian militia died versus 29,000 anti-government forces.

HRW had access to the full set of photographs including the Syrian army and civilian militia members killed in the conflict. Why did they not list the number of Syrian soldiers and security forces they identified? Why did they not show a single image of those victims?

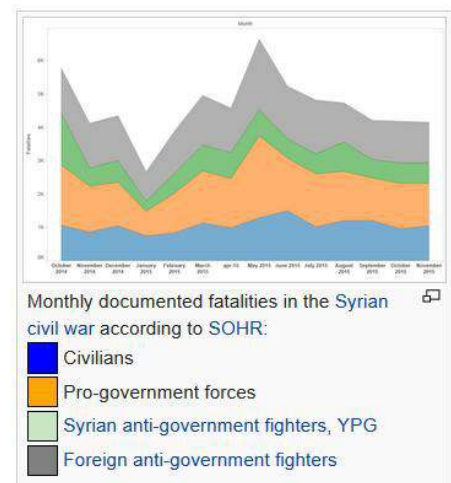
HRW goes beyond endorsing the falsehoods in the 'Caesar' story; they suggest it is a partial listing. On page 5 the report says, "Therefore, the number of bodies from detention facilities that appear in the Caesar photographs represent only a part of those who died in detention in Damascus."

On the contrary, the Caesar photographs seem to mostly show victims who died in a variety of ways in the armed conflict. The HRW assertions seem to be biased and inaccurate.

Death tolls by time periods [\[edit \]](#)

The following figures were all compiled by the SOHR which is considered an authoritative source on the matter.^[25] The figures are only for documented deaths, while the SOHR estimates another 95,000 undocumented deaths had occurred.^[2]

Time Period	Pro-government forces	Anti-government forces	Civilians	Grand Total (inc.unidentified)
2011 2012 2013	52,290 killed ^[26]	29,083 killed ^[26]	46,266 killed ^{[27][28]} (2013: 22,436)	2011: 7,841 killed ^[29] 2012: 49,294 killed ^[29] 2013: 73,447 killed ^[29]
2014	25,160 killed	32,726 killed	17,790 killed	76,021 killed ^[30]
2015	17,686 killed	24,010 killed	13,249 killed	55,219 killed ^[31]
January 2016	1,599 killed	1,687 killed	1,345 killed	4,680 killed ^[32]



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualties_of_the_Syrian_Civil_War

12. The legal accusations are biased and ignore the supreme crime of aggression.

The Christian Science Monitor journalist Dan Murphy gave an apt warning in his article on the Carter Ruck report about ‘Caesar’. While many journalists treated the prosecutors with uncritical deference, he said, *“Association with war crime prosecutions is no guarantor of credibility – far from it. Just consider [Luis Moreno Ocampo's absurd claims about Viagra and mass rape in Muammar Qaddafi's Libya in 2011](#). War crimes prosecutors have, unsurprisingly, a bias towards wanting to bolster cases against people they consider war criminals (like Assad or Qaddafi) and so should be treated with caution. They also frequently favor, as a class, humanitarian interventions.”*

The Carter Ruck legal team demonstrated how accurate those cautions were. They were eager to accuse the Syrian government of “crimes against humanity” but the evidence of “industrial killing”, “mass killing”, “torturing to kill” is dubious and much of the hard evidence shows something else.

In contrast, there is clear and solid evidence that a “Crime against Peace” is being committed against Syria. It is public knowledge that the “armed opposition” in Syria has been funded, supplied and supported in myriad ways by various outside governments. Most of the fighters, both Syrian and foreign, receive salaries from one or another outside power. Their supplies, weapons and necessary equipment are all supplied to them. Like the “Contras” in Nicaragua in the 1980’s, the use of such proxy armies is a violation of customary international law.

It is also a violation of the UN Charter which says “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other matter inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations”.

The government of Qatar has been a major supporter of the mercenaries and fanatics attacking the sovereign state of Syria. Given that fact, isn’t it hugely ironic to hear the legal contractors for Qatar accusing the Syrian government of “crimes against humanity”?

Isn’t it time for the United Nations to make internal changes and reforms so that it can start living up to its purposes? That will require, above all, demanding and enforcing compliance with the UN Charter and International Law.

EXCERPT FROM UNITED NATIONS CHARTER

Chapter I: Purposes And Principles [\[edit \]](#)

Main article: [Chapter I of the United Nations Charter](#)

Article 1 [\[edit \]](#)

The Purposes of the United Nations are^[1]

1. To maintain international peace and security to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace;

CONCLUSIONS

1. Huge numbers of people have died horrible deaths in the Syrian conflict. Regarding the ‘Caesar’ photos, it will take a much more objective, rigorous and scientific investigation with all the original photos in their original archived form to accurately understand who these victims are and how most of them died.
2. While the photos are real, the “Caesar” story of 11,000 victims of torture and killing is substantially false.
3. With few exceptions, mainstream media accepted and promoted the story without serious inquiry.
4. The ‘Caesar’ story played a role in demonizing the Syrian government and disrupting UN sponsored negotiations.
5. Western media and humanitarian organizations are quick to accuse the Syrian government of war crimes on the basis of hearsay and without solid evidence. The same organizations ignore crimes of aggression and crimes against peace by the West and its allies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the United Nations: Stop ignoring violations of the UN Charter by rich and powerful countries.

To the governments of France, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, UK and United States: Stop funding and supporting proxy armies attacking the sovereign state of Syria in clear violations of the UN Charter. Pay war reparations to Syria.

To Human Rights Watch: Open to inspection your interviews, notes and documentation regarding ‘Caesar’; make the audio or video transcripts of interviews available. Start acknowledging, documenting and speaking out against violations of the UN Charter including crimes against peace and acts of aggression. It is good to decry violations of the ‘rules of war’ but more important to limit and stop wars.

To the Carter Ruck Inquiry Team: Open to inspection the audio/video/written archives of your interviews, notes and documentation regarding ‘Caesar’; explain the role of the CIA in this story.

To CNN, the Guardian, LeMonde: Issue a correction acknowledging that nearly half the 55,000 ‘Caesar’ photos show dead Syrian soldiers and security. Acknowledge that other photos include opposition fighters and civilians killed in the conflict. Acknowledge that it is unclear how many victims were tortured or killed in Syrian detention centers.

To SAFMCD: Open the ‘Caesar’ files to inspection and review, including the original photos before they were manipulated.

To ‘Caesar’: Come forward and tell the truth. If your story is largely true, the Syrian government should be held to account. As it stands, there is good cause for skepticism about who you really are.

METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

We have closely reviewed and studied publicly available reports, interviews, videos and photographs. The primary sources are:

- ✓ Carter-Ruck report: “[A Report into the credibility of certain evidence with regard to Torture and Execution of Persons Incarcerated by the current Syrian regime](#)”
- ✓ Articles and video from international media such as CNN, LeMonde, NY Times, Guardian, etc.. Specific stories are identified within different parts of this report.
- ✓ Human Rights Watch Report: “[If the Dead Could Speak](#)”
- ✓ Syrian Association of Missing and Conscience Detainees (SAFMCD) - [Website of SAFMCD](#) contains approximately 6700 images of dead persons. These are all publicly viewable on the internet. Almost all are facial photos. The accompanying body photographs are not shown. Nor are the photos of dead Syrian soldiers and militia or scenes and victims of explosions or car bombs.
- ✓ [Monitor on Massacre Marketing](#) research/investigation website with raw data and notes.
- ✓ [A Closer Look at Syria](#) website pages devoted to “Torture Photos” and much more.
- ✓ Syrian Network for Human Rights report: “[The Photographed Holocaust](#)”
- ✓ Human Rights Investigations [report](#) on HRW Caesar Photos report
- ✓ Opposition website <https://en.zamanalwsl.net/galleries.php>

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